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ABSTRACT

As social problems continue to threaten the fabric of American society, the community has emerged as the single entity capable of meeting these challenges. It is increasingly important, then, that community colleges position themselves for the role of rebuilding communities. The loss of traditional support systems, changes in family structure, loss of educational potential, crime, a declining economy, poverty, and an aging population are critical concerns for rebuilding the community. Strategies which can help position community colleges to effectively rebuild communities include the following: (1) redefine the courses, forms of instruction, and delivery methods that make up the education process, focusing new definitions on workforce training and lifelong learning; (2) reconsider the notion of "customer," placing more attention on groups and entire communities; (3) redefine the institution's role in the community as a focal point in a community network designed to foster cooperation and offer guidance for continuing development; and (4) develop the learning community by bridging the gap between traditional and non-traditional education. Although issues related to funding, the loss of college mission, and lines of authority will have to be solved, the community college campus of the future should be a centralized educational, social, and community institution providing an array of services from the public and private sectors. Contains 36 references. (TGI)

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Community Cores: The Future for the Community College Campus

A Roundtable Presentation Delivered at the
75th Annual Convention of the
American Association of Community Colleges,
Minneapolis, MN, April, 1995

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Presentation Abstract

As American society appears to be deteriorating from numerous social ills, the community has emerged as the single entity capable of meeting these challenges. The community college of the future can and should position itself for the pivotal role of rebuilding our communities.

Community college leaders and faculty need to adopt a visionary attitude toward their institutions and community colleges in general. Such visionary leadership is needed to redesign all two-year colleges to incorporate a new role as convener and rebuilder of communities. Community college personnel must be willing to accept as well as promote the drastic changes that may even necessitate rebuilding the college from within.

What follows is a brief presentation of some of the social problems; such as crime, urban decay, and greed; which have threatened the very fabric of our society. Incorporated into this information is a view of the traditional junior college which still exists in many communities and, unlike many community colleges, has not attempted to address any of these problems.

Society's Decline

- A recent Time/CNN poll recorded an increase from 40% in 1985 to 53% today of Americans who believe that our society is in distress (Hull, 1995).

- The social health index at Fordham University's Institute for Innovation in Social Policy measures 16 social problems on a scale that runs from 1 (serious) to 100 (utopia). In 1970 the index recorded a total of 73.8, and in 1994, a total of 35 (Hull, 1995).

Some of the Critical Concerns:

- Our society has suffered a loss of traditional support systems; such as families, neighborhoods, churches, and community centers (Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 1988; Coontz, 1995).

  --People no longer feel a part of a community (Boyer, 1986).

  --Increasingly isolated, individuals in our society can experience a sense of powerlessness when confronted by the mammoths of business and government.

  --86% of Americans believe that their survival depends solely on their own abilities and skills (Hull, 1995).

  --The privatization of services through community associations grew from 10,000 in 1970 to 150,000 in 1993 and include 1 in 8 people nationwide (Hull, 1995).

- Families

  --At least 6 million children live in homes with mothers who gave birth as adolescents (Hamburg, 1993).

  --Child care centers cared for 14% of preschoolers in 1985 and 28% of them in 1990 (Hamburg, 1993).

  --The size of families today is smaller than at any other time in our history (Miller, 1990).

--25% of U. S. households consist of solitary residents (Miller, 1990) and 29% are "non-family" households (Popenoe, 1993).

--19% of mothers in two-parent homes were employed in 1960, but 59% of them were employed in 1990 (Popenoe, 1993). Over 65% of mothers with preschool-aged children are employed today (Wisensale, 1992).

--Marriage has traditionally been regarded as a means for economic security and procreation. This view has changed to emphasize only a path toward self-fulfillment (Popenoe, 1993).

--The average married couple today has more parents than children (Wisensale, 1992).

- Education

--Citizens are unable to develop their own educational potentials (Añorve, 1989; Boone, 1992; Harlacher & Gollattscheck, 1992a; Edwards, Fanelli, Hsu, Rotella, Koltai, & Godbold, 1987).

--One of four adults in 1989 had not completed high school (Griffith & Connor, 1994).

--Furthermore, people need more education for today's workforce than they did previously (Popenoe, 1993).

--This lost educational potential can mean lost income; reduced tax revenues; additional costs for crime prevention and punishment, welfare, and vocational training; and further losses from crime (Austin, 1994; Cafferty & Spangenberg, 1983).

- Crime
  - --Although the overall crime rate has declined since 1991, the odds of becoming a victim are far greater than they were in 1963 (Shannon, 1995).
  - --In a Time/CNN poll, 89% of the respondents think crime is getting worse, and 55% fear becoming victims (Shannon, 1995).
  - --From 1984 to 1994, juvenile arrests rose 68% for violent crimes (Shannon, 1995).
- Economy
  - --Aside from inherited wealth, education affects an individual's economic status more than all other demographic characteristics (Crispell, 1994).
  - --Real family income fell 8.3% since 1973, even with the increase in two-paycheck families (Wisensale, 1992).
- Poverty
  - --Our society has a real potential of creating a permanent underclass and a dual class structure (Elsner, 1991). The middle class lost numbers at a rate of four to one to lower and upper classes in the 1980s (Wisensale, 1992).
  - --Neighborhoods are more likely to be segregated by income than by race, according to the 1994 census (Hodgkinson, 1995).
  - --The poorest 20% of families with children experienced a drop from 7.4% to 4.8% of their share of total income from 1968 to 1993 (Wisensale, 1992).

--Six million children under six were below poverty line at birth, and 23% of all children born in 1992 were below the poverty line (Hodgkinson, 1995).

--Half of the children born in 1992 will live with a single parent. A direct correlation exists between children in poverty and single parents (Hodgkinson, 1995).

--The fastest growing group of homeless people (33% in 1988) are families with children (Wisensale, 1992).

--25% of all pregnant women get little or no prenatal care (Hamburg, 1993).

--Poverty is the single greatest educational handicapping condition (Hodgkinson, 1995).

- Aging population--population over 65:

--In 1994, 1.7 million people were over the age of 65. In 2026, the estimate is 3.9 million people (Fiscal Notes, Dec., 1994).

--The median age in 1970 was 28 and will be 36 in 1999 (Miller, 1990).

--The ratio of adults over 65 to those under 65 will double from 1:5 today to 2:5 by 2030 (Wisensale, 1992).

- The political arena is unable to effectively confront these problems (Mawby, 1992). In fact, none of the structures functioning in our society has successfully fostered the changes necessary or offered sufficiently broad solutions, while numerous special interests continue to complicate the process of meeting societal needs (Mawby, 1992).

- As the problems mount and our social infrastructure continues to crumble, real, meaningful solutions to these national problems will be possible only at the local level (Mawby, 1992; Viar, 1991).

Indicators of a Need for a New Organization

- The small business administration anticipates that the number of businesses will grow from 18 million to 25 million during the current decade (Griffith & Connor, 1994).
- To take the place of the missing family structures, a new entity (the cooperative affiliation) is needed to offer a nurturing, protective environment and necessary human contact and interaction, resembling the extended family structures of our past.
- In a recent Wingspread study, four expected issues for community colleges are the demise of the traditional academic schedule, the departure from traditional classroom delivery, increased community involvement, and an increasing need for collaborative efforts with the private sector (Roueche, 1995). All of these issues support the notion that the junior college concept will soon end and call for changes even in today's comprehensive community college.
- Hence, the continuing shift from junior colleges to comprehensive community colleges must be concluded, because cities and towns cannot continue to be burdened with still one more drain on the support system, the outdated junior college model.

- Institutions that continue to offer college transfer programs exclusively (and thus ignore the needs of society) will not endure (Lorenzo, 1991).

  --Private junior colleges already demonstrate an ominous trend, with over half showing enrollments below 600 (Williams & Colby, 1991).

- The Institute for Future Studies (1992) also identified some critical concerns: the traditional community college mission is changing, current personnel may be more preoccupied with retirement than with visionary planning for the institution's future, and support is needed for strengthening families and ethical values.
- The concept of building communities, therefore, is insufficient. What is needed now is the realization of a concept of "rebuilding" communities, an initiative to bolster or reinvent support systems that have deteriorated (Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 1988; Griffith & Connor, 1994).

Proposed Solutions

Next, we will examine some of the efforts which community colleges can undertake to meet these challenges, including some projects which are already underway. A part of this process will also initiate another significant growth period for community colleges nationwide.

- A redefinition of the actual education process within the college itself is necessary. Driven by a focus on workforce training, retraining, & lifelong learning, changes in traditional academic procedures must be considered (McDowell, 1991; Owens, 1991; Phelps, 1994).
  --Courses previously criticized (e.g., parenting, basic skills) will require reevaluation.
  --Traditional forms of instruction not suited to varying learning styles should be abandoned.
  --Scheduling, instructional sites, and fee requirements that are rigid and consequently restrictive should also be altered.
  --The actual process of program delivery may need to be changed.
- Community colleges must reconsider the notion of "customer," which will require more attention to groups, especially entire communities (Lorenzo, 1991).
- A redefinition of the institution's role in the community itself is needed as well. The community college must expand its role to become the focal point in a community network designed to foster cooperation and offer guidance for continuing development (Boone, 1992).
  --An essential aspect in this new institution's mission will be "comprehensive community development" (Lorenzo, 1991).
    > Three community service areas expected to require continued focus in the future are economic development, information management, and cultural and social development (Lorenzo, 1991).

--The college's major responsibility will be to initiate and support a variety of cooperative ventures with other schools, the private sector, and government services (Boone, 1992; Elsner, 1991; Griffith & Connor, 1994; Hankin, 1992; Harlacher & Gollattscheck, 1992b; Lorenzo, 1991; Mawby, 1992; Mittelstet, 1994).

--The inherent strength of these alliances will yield political empowerment sufficient to develop programs for solving many of our social problems (Boone, 1992; Temple, 1991).

--Sharing or pooling resources, one benefit of such alliances, is both cost-effective and attractive. Hence unnecessary duplication of similar services, such as libraries, can be avoided.

- Another mission for the new community college is the development of the learning community, taking a leadership role in bridging the gap between traditional and non-traditional education.

--Repeating an already familiar theme, fostering cooperation among education providers is certainly one way to develop learning communities. The Commission on the Future of Community Colleges (1988) suggested a "seamless web" of education.

--Sharing resources and space among educational institutions may be only the beginning for such cooperative arrangements.

--Opportunities for sharing could include child supervision, peer tutoring, and the pooling of resources such as libraries and support services.

Examples of Community College Initiatives

Partnerships:

- Some community colleges have already taken the lead in developing partnerships designed to support business incubators, community growth, industrial parks, and school improvement initiatives (Elsner, 1991; Lorenzo, 1991).
- Miami-Dade Community College brought together numerous community groups in an effort to increase high school completion for minority students, while establishing college scholarships for them.
- Chemeketa Community College became one of the first institutions to combine community-related services, such as job placement and mental health services, at one location.
- Maricopa Community College District helped to create the Phoenix Think Tank; a task force of elementary and secondary schools, two-year colleges, and a university; that has developed programs for at-risk retention, minority teacher preparation, and community development.

Outreach:

- Frontier College in Toronto based the curriculum of its Beat the Street outreach program on the street environment, using volunteer "street people" to provide literacy skills and some degree of self-esteem (Pearpoint & Forest, 1990).
- The City Colleges of Chicago have offered services in housing projects (Griffith & Connor, 1994).

- Miami-Dade Community College opened an outreach center in Overtown after the area had been hit with riots (Griffith & Connor, 1994).
- Bronx Community College created off-campus centers, including one in the Parkchester Apartments (Weidenthal, 1989).
- Maricopa Community College District has operated an education center in the Hispanic community of Guadalupe.
- Kansas City has a program at the Wayne Minor Federal Housing Project (Weidenthal, 1989).
- Jacksonville's Downtown Campus supports programs at the Liberty Street Center and the Blodgett Public Housing Project (Weidenthal, 1989).
- Courses are offered in two housing projects, nearby prisons, and juvenile centers in Denver (Weidenthal, 1989).
- Sleepy Hollow center in Detroit offers an associate degree in child care (Weidenthal, 1989).

The Future Community College Campus

Lastly, we will consider a new concept for the campus of the future community college. This new type of center should be designed to meet the challenges listed above and others as they arise. The final section will consider some insights and questions about the efficacy of this new model.

Description:

- The new community college should be a centralized educational institution, incorporating kindergarten through higher education, that would demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning.

--The Commission on the Future of Community Colleges (1988) suggested that community colleges become community education centers. Such centers could provide for education what HMOs do for health care (Harlacher & Gollattscheck, 1992b).

- What is proposed here is a whole new concept, philosophically and structurally, for the community college--maybe the name "college" will no longer be appropriate as the community education center incorporates not only a range of educational, social, and community needs, but also provides an array of services from both the public and the private sector.
- A new core must be forged to re-establish cooperation and unified strength for the isolated individuals left as traditional family and community support structures have changed or disappeared.
- This new community core can enable the community to reinforce its own economic development, take on the role of a quasi-surrogate family unit, provide for increased diversity and sharing, and thus foster ethnic and cultural understanding, which should reduce urban violence somewhat.
- Learning opportunities of this new community center should enhance the process of solving problems like unemployment, homelessness, crime, and a host of other social ills.
- Community colleges are now charged with a new mission, that of rebuilding communities.

- Another wave of expansion should be pursued to place these centers wherever the community needs warrant their operation.
- Because cities are rapidly declining and some towns are actually disappearing (Geisel, study in progress), one of these education centers will be needed in every community.
- As McDowell (1991) so aptly observed, the time has come not simply to predict the future, but to create it as well.

Design:

- A complex of educational, social, and business services may be suited to a facility not unlike a shopping mall. The design of the Spring Creek campus of Collin County Community College (Plano, TX) is a good example. The facilities of the Spring Creek campus are entirely under one roof with spacious lobbies and an inviting atmosphere literally resembling that of a shopping center.
- San Diego Community College District's Educational Cultural Complex includes plans for a public library, food services, a community theatre, and other urban services (full application of the model is still incomplete--J. Sullivan, personal communication, October 11, 1994).
- Both the Maricopa Community College District and the Houston Community College System have pursued a "campus without walls" concept that provides college programs in multiple settings and with a variety of delivery systems.
- The possible options for the new community college are as varied as the range of services to meet the unique needs of the community, but a suggested design possibility is presented in Figure 1.

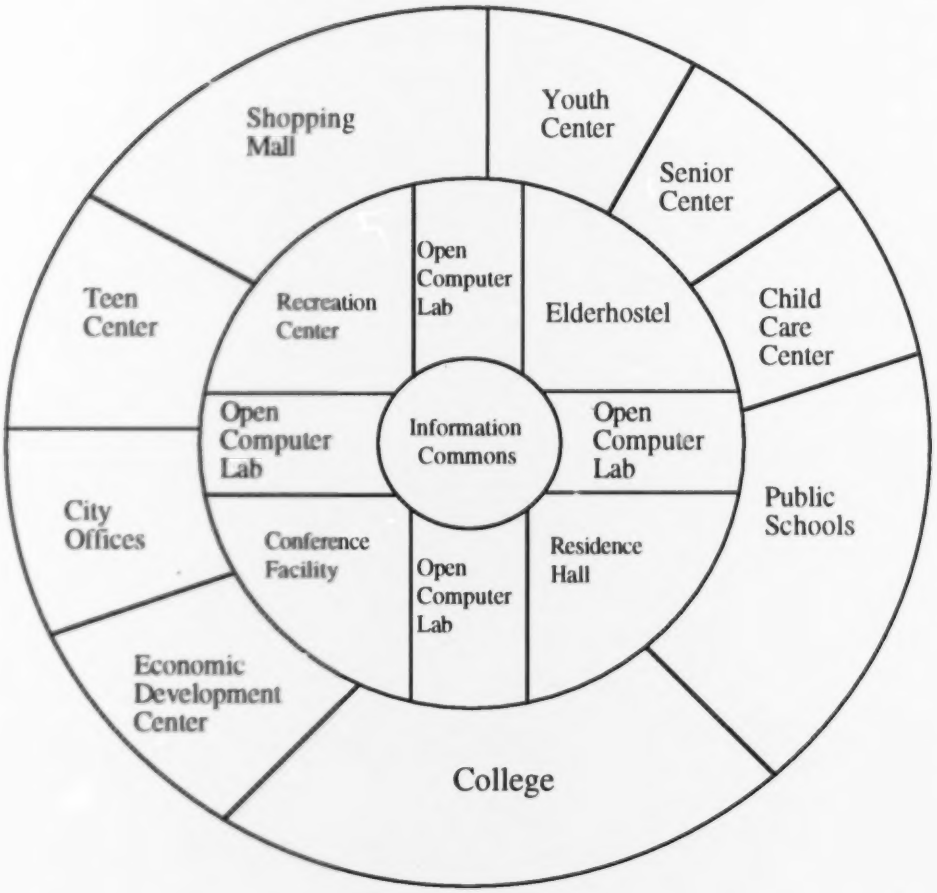

Figure 1. A proposed floor plan of the new educational center.

Potential Problems with the New Model

Funding

- Naturally, funding such centers will be a problematic issue, particularly in light of the reduced emphasis on higher education by both national and state leaders. Yet, the community college is in an important position to help reverse the funding slide (Perkins, Powell, Seyler, Trachtenberg, & Tyree, 1984). In essence, the community college's dependence on the state must end.
- Many towns cannot solely support a community college, let alone a larger educational complex. Therefore, a number of options, including the traditional district arrangement or the extension center, may be necessary.

Loss of "college"/Expanding mission too much:

- The individual institution's mission will be guided by the community and will understandably change with the needs of the community.
- The transfer college (junior college) has served its purpose--more is needed.

Who's in charge:

- We are obsessed with the need to establish administrative positions and functions to define responsibilities and limit the types of abuse that have become commonplace, even with close oversight. Hence, the issue of who is to be in charge of shared resources, space, and/or personnel is a critical one that must be resolved for this new concept

of an educational center to succeed. Fortunately, in some sectors, the era of shared leadership is already at hand.

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